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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Talk. Test. Treat. April 10-16 is National STD Awareness Week**

April 12, 2022, ANCHORAGE – The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) recognizes April 10-16 as STD Awareness Week.

STD Awareness Week provides an annual opportunity to raise awareness about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), reduce STD-related stigma and ensure people have the tools and knowledge to prevent, test for and treat STDs.

Today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 2020 STD case reports were drastically reduced at the beginning of the pandemic but by the end of the year, cases of gonorrhea, syphilis and congenital syphilis surpassed 2019 levels.

Alaska's 2020 syphilis case reports mirrored the national trend, with cases dramatically increasing in adults and newborns. Alaska now ranks third (3<sup>rd</sup>) in the nation for primary and secondary syphilis cases and ninth (9<sup>th</sup>) in the nation for reported cases of congenital syphilis. Although chlamydia and gonorrhea cases decreased, Alaska continues to rank third (3<sup>rd</sup>) and eighth (8<sup>th</sup>), respectively, for those infections. Because chlamydia and gonorrhea usually do not have symptoms and are identified through screening, the decline in reported cases for these infections is likely due to decreased STD screening and underdiagnosis during the pandemic, rather than a reduction in new cases.

When STDs do not have symptoms, you can have an infection and not know it. Even without symptoms, the infection can damage your body, affect an unborn baby and be passed to others. Having an STD can also put people at higher risk for acquiring HIV infection. For example, an STD can cause a sore or a break in the skin, which can make it easier for HIV to enter the body.

TALK. TEST. TREAT. Health care providers are encouraged to offer STD prevention and sexual health counseling as part of their routine practice. Providers should talk to patients about their sexual health and offer testing. In addition, Alaskans should talk openly to their providers and partners about their sexual health and ask about STD and HIV testing.

“Health care providers can’t help you if they don’t know your concerns,” said DHSS HIV/STD Program Manager Susan Jones. “It’s important to talk to your provider about your sexual health and to request comprehensive testing. Standard testing often includes screening for gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis and HIV. Depending on your sexual history, other tests may be needed. Talk to your provider about which testing is right for you. If you test positive, get treated and encourage your partners to also get tested and treated.”

These infections can be prevented. If you are sexually active, you can lower your risk of getting an STD in several ways, including using a condom the correct way, getting tested, regularly seeking prompt treatment and helping to get all sexual partners tested and treated. Most STDs are treatable. The sooner you get tested, the sooner you can protect your health, the health of your unborn baby, and the health of your partner(s).

The CDC recommends that health care providers test everyone aged 13–64 years for HIV at least once as part of their routine health care. Alaskans should also talk to their clinical providers about their sexual health and see if PrEP (the once-daily pill to prevent HIV infection) is beneficial for them.

To find a testing location, visit [gettested.cdc.gov](https://gettested.cdc.gov). Prevention and testing options, such as condoms, STD self-test kits and HIV self-test kits, can also be mailed to Alaskans through [iKnowMine](https://www.alaska.gov/iknowmine), the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium’s HIV/STD Prevention Program.

More information:

- CDC: [STD Awareness Week](#)
- DHSS: [HIV/STD Program, STD Awareness, PrEP for HIV Prevention](#)
- ANTHC: [iKnowMine.org](https://www.alaska.gov/iknowmine.org), [HIV Testing](#), [STD Testing – I Want the Kit](#)

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